

Iris

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Summary: Deep in the Forbidden Forest, danger and mystery lurks.

James Sirius Potter has never been one to back down from a challenge, however, and often finds himself fascinated by what hides within the shadows. But when Charlotte emerges from the depths of darkness, James finds himself asking questions. Who is this girl, and how did she get here?

Iris

It was excruciating.

The dagger slashed through my wrist with ease, like a warm knife slicing butter. The pain was slow, deliberate and all too familiar, yet I held no memory of this ever happening before.

I tried to move. With every fibre of my existence, I truly tried to move, but they would not allow me too. Two of them held me down whilst the third one imitated the exact movements she had used to cut my other wrist. I writhed, screamed and recoiled in anguish even though I knew it was useless.

None of them paid attention to me; they were all far too fixated on watching the blood that once flowed thick and scarlet in my veins, now cascading like a waterfall in two glass goblets either side of me.

I could do nothing but swallow the pain and watch the midnight clouds subside to reveal the bright and glaring full moon. Perhaps I should have felt fear, but I didn't. Instead, I felt my body sink into a state of deep relaxation and accept that death may just be around the corner.

My eyelids were slowly starting to droop whilst my last few breaths began to wane. The feeling in my body was growing dimmer: I could no longer move legs, my hands, or even lift a finger tip. The three

beings that had once held me down in dark masks were now surrounding me and taking sips of my blood from the goblet. Despite this unsettling event, I found my last few breaths caught in my throat as the strangers that stood above me removed their masks, for one of them was my mother.

"Charlotte- Charlotte, wake up... it's time to wake up, girl!"

I was violently shaken awake before a deep and demanding breath forced its way out of my body. Bolting upright in my bed, sweat dripped from every part of me as the memoryâ€‘ the feeling of dying played over in my mind. It was not until I took in my surroundings I noticed I was very much alive and in my small and danky bedroom. Everything was the same, from the paintings of the forest that surrounded our home to the one's I had composed from my very imagination. Even Beast, the one eyed wolf whom I had rescued as a cub, still lay in his usual spot beside me.

"You gone and done it again, girl. I told ya, didn't I? What the hell is wrong with ya," my mother, or Mallory as I called her, spat in my face. Although this bothered me to no end, what ground my teeth even more so was her constant mispronunciation of words.

I chose not correct her. I'd done it once before, and she bloody well made sure I learnt my lesson the first time.

"And look 'ere, you bloodied the sheets," she stood above me and shook her head in disapproval as her wiry grey hair fell in her face.

My eyes followed her glance over my bed and it was the first time I had seen the patches of stained blood within the sheets. I opened my mouth to speak the same moment my mother's large hand grabbed my wrist. Pain shuddered through my body and without thinking, I forced my arm from her grasp and examined the crusted dry blood that lined both my wrists.

In that second all the emotions and memories from last night I seemed to be missing came crashing back to me like harsh waves against rocks.

"Y-You-" I stuttered, and found myself falling off of my bed, trying to put as much distance between my mother and I as possible.

Those stone cold eyes she wore were imprinted in my brain, and the way they had held my glare last night whilst she watched me take my last few breaths.

Something seemed to register within her mind as her eyes suddenly grew soft and she lowered her raised hands.

"Charlotte, dear, c'mon now, you've hurt yourself. Let me help." The way she so swiftly changed her tone of voice and body language reminded me of the time I brought Beast back when he was just a cub. The women had gone berserk just at the sight of the wolf, accusing me of bringing vermin and disease into our home. Just as quickly as she had raised her hand to me back then for disobeying her rules, she had in a blink of an eye composed herself with a hollow smile and told me to go play with my new friend.

This time, however, I refused to ignore the change in my mother's bipolar attitude. The memories from last night felt too real to dismiss, the pain I felt in my wrists were evidence of that.

"Why did you cut me?" I questioned, my voice sounding a lot stronger than I felt. "I-I saw youâ€œ last night, with the other two, I watched as you slit my wrists like I'm some sort of meat and then drink my blood? I- I died!"

Maybe I was seeing things through the madness that was my mind right now, but I could swear the grey had disappeared from my mother's hair. It was black, thick and almost youthful looking.

"Rubbish, girl." she cackled, "ya' have done this to yourself. Ya' mad, just like your father-"

"My father?" I spoke over her, bewildered, she'd never so much as mentioned my father before or even what his name is. For as long as I could remember he had always be referred to as the abomination of our life, I never asked why, I had always been too afraid too.

It seemed I had caught her off guard, her eyes were wide like a deer caught in headlights and she was lost for words. I was more than positive she was not suppose to mention him.

She attempted to maneuver around my bed and towards me, but it only forced myself back against the wall even more. "Charlotte, ya' need to stop this stupidity. Ya' hurt yourself in the night, ya' have done it before and I'm sure ya' will do it again," she sighed and went to grasp an object from under my covers. "Look," she held up a dagger, "I don't know how or where ya' got this from, but ya' must have had a nightmare and hurt yourself in the night."

I could only blink in complete confusion as she held up the same dagger I was almost sure was the one that cut me last night.

"Ya' said ya' died last night, but ya' are alive right now, girl. It was a nightmare, that's all." A small and concerned smile resided on my mother's lips, and caused the several warts across her aging face to crinkle more than they should.

My mother was not the most beautiful of women; in fact, she was the only other person I had ever met. The only women I had to compare her to were the ones I saw pictures of in some of my books, and they were fictional. My mother however, was not, her face was long and pointed with a nose that appeared to have been broken numerous times. Her hair was a wild mane of ugly black tangles and she didn't exactly smell any better either.

It was strange to say the least; I looked nothing like her. Whenever I had had the chance to catch a glimpse of myself in one of the forests ponds, not once had I spotted any moles or warts upon my face. My hair was an abundance of annoying raven coloured curls and I stood at least a couple of inches taller than her. Not to the mention her eyes were a stone cold blue that could pierce your soul at times. Whereas my own were a duller shade of green, definitely not blue.

Shaking my head, I thought maybe she's right, maybe it was a nightmare, but it still irked me that I couldn't shake the feeling

that I actually had passed away last night.

After several more moments of trying to calm me, my mother left me to clean myself and gather my thoughts. I walked through the small room and out into the basking sunlight of the cool autumn morning. The forest I was raised in and knew all too well loomed over our small hut we called a home, the branches reaching out and protecting us within their shadows. I was not sure how long we had live here in this forest or even where here was. Of course, I knew there were different cities and towns around the world, I was not born yesterday. It had always been a dream of mine to travel, perhaps visit France, the home of my favourite book, Beauty and the Beast. But it was only that: a dream.

My mother told me the world was a nasty place, full of creatures that would could obliterate you with a wave of a stick; Witches and Wizards she called them. She said they were magical beings that used sticks they called wands, and these wands held the darkest of magic. When I was younger, she would tell me bedtime stories every night about a boy with a lightning bolt for a scar who grew up to become this century's most evil wizard. He had wiped out most of the the world's population and that was why we lived secluded and hiding in the forest, trying to survive.

I never complained. I quite enjoyed the outdoors and our little box home.

A metal tub sat outside of the front door, just big enough that it allowed me to fit in it. Like every other morning after years of practise, I closed my eyes and concentrated on the thought of a steady stream, imagining as though there was water running through me and into the tub. When I finally let my eyes flutter back open, the tub was full of murky but clean water. Although was still cold to touch, no matter how hard I tried I could never seem to channel my magic well enough to make the water even the slightest bit warm.

I stripped off all my bearings and winced as I stepped into the ice cold water. The cool temperature momentarily chilled me, but I bared it.

I bathed for what felt like hours, dipping myself under the water and watching as the dried blood from my wrists turned the water a dirty red. It did not prevent me from washing my body and hair, and allowing myself a few moments of peace before finally hauling myself out of the tub. The cold of the autumn breeze hit my body like a thousand needles, but I was happy the pain I felt in my wrists had finally subsided to a dull ache, as it had already scabbed over.

After I dressed myself in one of the few pieces of clothing I owned; a pair of loose cotton trousers and once white t shirt that is a few sizes too small for me, I walked into the kitchen come living room.

The wasn't much of this room; the kitchen was lined up against one side of the wall with a gas hob and metal sink we had to conjure water for. An old wooden bookcase stood to the right of the room, filled with unread books that held thousands of majestic words that my mother nor me could begin to comprehend. I had learnt to read basic words when I was young as it was all my mother could teach me,

anything descriptive I was still attempting to teach myself. This, however, did not stop me from reading and slowly getting better. A pile of large books sat beside the bookcase in a messy pile, these were the ones I had completed; the ones with more pictures than words.

I glanced around the room, it was the only other one within our home besides my own. Sometimes I dreamt I lived in a grander house than this one; every room was filled with my paintings on the walls of the different places I had travelled, the kitchen was separate from the living room and it even had its own bathroom with running hot water. I did not live on my own of course, there was always a man in my dreams, like the ones from the books I read, they loved me and we always lived happily. However, that was all it was, just a silly dream.

My mother always told me I should grateful for what I had and that my dreams were just silly fantasies formed from my selfish imagination.

I sighed, maybe I should count myself lucky to be alive within this world we lived in.

The similar scent of some concoction my mother makes me drink everyday, wafted through the room and made my head feel dreary.

She has never told me what is in this drink, but from the books I've read and the ingredients I have been made to harvest from the forests ground, I have learnt one ingredient is mistletoe berries.

"Now, girl, like we've practised everyday, wave ya' hand over the cauldron and say—"

"Obliviate." I utter the word before she can tell me, my head in another place and instantly know something has gone wrong. The hideous square of fabric we call a sofa suddenly decides to combust and I know it's my doing.

My mother slammed her fist down on the kitchen counter and had to inhale a deep breath to calm herself. "Charlotte," she breathed, "Why are ya' always away the fairies. We've talked about this, ya' just can't go doing magic willy nilly. Ya' know how sensitive ya' are to it. Now take a deep breath," I done as she says and inhaled the musky smell of the liquid, "Think of ya' happiest thought and say Obliviate."

The memory came quickly to me, swirling into my mind in a puff of smoke and forming itself into the shape of an apple tree. I heard laughter- children laughing, a boy to be specific and smelt the scent of freshly cut grass. I knew it was not a real memory, simply one within my wildest imagination, yet it's the happiest one I have.

I smiled and let the words spill so confidently from my lips, I hardly sounded like myself, "Obliviate."

This time nothing exploded, except for the sound of my mother's gasp. I opened my eyes to witness hundreds of the iris flower blossoming from the floorboards and could not help but allow a smile to grace my lips. This always happened, every time I felt an emotion of overwhelming happiness the flower grew out of nowhere. I never knew

why it was this specific flower, it did not even grow in the forest around us.

With a scowl cemented on her face, the older woman added more ingredients to the concoction and I repeated the word one last time to complete it. She poured the broth like liquid into a small vial and handed it to me.

"Now drink up," she ordered.

It was hard not to wrinkle my nose at the vial, it smelt and not a good sort of smell, "Why do I have to drink this?"

"We 'ave had this conversation before, and I'll tell ya' again. Ya' are special, Charlotte, and this drink will make ya' strong. Now no more questions, ya' have always asked far too many. Drink." She urged the vial into my hands.

With a frown, I couldn't help but become more curious, why was she so insistent I drink this rubbish? It never made me feel any stronger, in fact most the time it made me feel nauseous.

"I just don't understand. I'm not a child anymore, mum. You can tell me if you're poisoning me." I played a joke with a half hearted smile, although my mother's unnerving face told me she wasn't the slightest bit amused.

"Ya' are hardly an adult, ya' are only sixteen, girl. And right now ya' are getting on my last nerve, Now drink from that damn vial." She commanded and I followed her instructions, knocking back the liquid in one.

I shuddered at the taste, never could I get used to it, I only wished I had something strong to chase it down with. Shaking my head, I placed the vial onto the kitchen side and grimaced at a bloodied gash across my wrist, "Mallory, how did I get this cut? It looks nasty."

"Ya' don't remember?"

I shook my head, I would have remembered getting a cut like that.

"Ya' must have fallen over, girl," she shrugged and I copied her actions, sure it was nothing to worry about.

"Well if it's okay I was going to take Beast out and see if I can catch any food for dinner later."

"Mind ya'self out there, remember to stay within the borders of our land and-"

"If I ever see another living person with a wand run as fast and as hard as I can because wizards and witches alike are evil, and will harvest my insides for some conniving evil ritual." My lips tugged into a grin, and I could tell from the scowl on my mother's face, she was not happy with the last part I commented.

"I will never know where ya' got your humour from."

It was not long before I was set with my handmade backpack filled with a bottle of fresh water from a stream that ran alongside our home, and a couple of rock cakes my mother had made that truly did taste more like actual rock than cake. Out here, however, in the woods, I had learnt to accept what was given to me. We lived off of fish we hauled from the stream, or even rabbits I often caught in traps I had learnt to make. Vegetables were few and fair, spread across our small part of the forest that sometimes we had to go weeks without them until they could be harvested again.

If I could've, I would have crossed the border of our land a long time ago to obtain more food, but my mother never deemed it appropriate. According to her; outside of the border was like a warzone and if I stepped over it then I was as good as dead.

Beast trudged along beside me with his tongue lolling out the side of his mouth. His name truly did not do him justice, he was more beauty than beast and never turned down a good rub of his belly. With fur that was mixed with beautiful greys and browns, and topped with white tipped guard hairs, it was his gold flecked eyes that were the windows of his soul. They were full of emotion I had never felt myself: love and hope. Even as he cocked his head to the side and gazed at me with his rounded eyes, I could see the curiosity swimming in them for the need to run ahead and explore.

I gave a nod and with that, Beast was off running on his hind legs. I ran after him and even though the wolf was twice as fast, I managed to keep sight of him. Running until I couldn't breath anymore, I relished in the sweat that dripped down the back of my neck and in between my shoulder blades. It's what allowed me to feel free, pretending for just a second there were no borders, no evil wizards and simply just my wolf and I.

The sun was warm; beaming but not burning as I came to a halt where Beast had finally decided to settle down in our usual spot. It's a place my mother never came, right along side the border of our land where a light blue vehicle sat. I could tell it was a car from the pictures I had seen in my books, and an old one at that from its rusted exterior. It had been here for as long as I could remember.

It took a hard tug to open the door of the car as I had broke the handle off years ago. I have always liked to think of this place as my secret escape, it's where I always came to think and get away.

Climbing into the passenger seat, I opened the compartment in the front and pulled out a bottle of firewhis-. That's at least what the bottle reads, half the label being ripped off from years of neglect. I had only found the bottle a couple months ago and learnt from just from one swig, its name definitely done it justice; my mouth had been on fire. It's also the one thing that can disguise the taste of the horrid liquid my mother makes me drink.

Knocking back a gulp, I reveled in the taste; letting the burning sensation warm the pit of my stomach. I was just about to take another when Beast began to howl.

"What's up, boy?" I called as I jumped out of the car and witnessed him digging up something from the ground.

Kneeling down beside him, I picked up what seemed to resemble a rather large, burnt black book. I turned it over in my hands and rubbed off the dirt that coats the book's cover, it was hard to make out but I could just about read the title that lined the binding.

The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection

It's strange, I think, why would there be a book buried on our land?

As curiosity got the better of me, I began to flick through the pages and words started to jump out at me; dementors, basilisk, inferius, werewolf, vampire, hags. There were far too many to read all at once, but the ones that had my hands shaking were the chapters that held the word 'wand'. I knew this wasn't just any book, it had to be a dark book, one that appeared to hold information about the witches and wizards.

I could not help myself, I had to keep reading.

They say curiosity killed the cat, but it was satisfaction that brought it back, and it was more than satisfaction I felt at that moment. Confusion, fulfillment, fear? All the emotions filled my mind as I skimmed the words of the book, turning page by page.

One excerpt read of a spell or jinx that allowed the caster to 'knock back' their opponent, whilst others told of ways to protect oneself from dark creatures.

I couldn't understand, my mother had told me witches and wizards were malevolent, yet this book taught them of ways to protect themselves against evil? It made no sense.

Turning another page, I began to read the first paragraph about hags when Beast started to growl. From the way his ears had picked up and legs were crouched, fear set into my own features, creasing my brows together.

I crept forward, wary of any pursuers that may be a head and knelt down beside Beast. I thought perhaps it was another wolf, maybe even a hippogriff and I hoped for anything it wasn't that bloody three headed dog we had once ran for our lives from. What we saw is far beyond anything I've seen before.

A boy stood a good couple feet in front of us, he hadn't noticed us yet and I had to smooth down the fur on Beasts back in order to prevent him from lunging. The first thing I noticed about this boy was the crisp black trousers he was wearing and the white shirt that is crinkled up at the sleeves and stretched tightly across his arms. His hair was a short black mess that curled slightly on top and I suddenly had the urge to make myself noticeable just to see the colour of his eyes.

He was throwing what looked like raw meat at absolutely nothing, yet he laughed and stroked something I could not see.

This boy was crazier than I was.

Beast crouched lower, his growls growing louder and it was enough to earn us a sudden glance from the boy. His eyes widened in fear as he spied Beast and just when I thought he was going to break into a run, he done the unthinkable and pulled out the one thing I was told to make a run from myself; a wand.

"Petrificus Totalus!" He yells the moment Beast lunged for him.

His voice was clear and confident, and I had been a fool to mistake what I thought was fear in his eyes because he was smiling, as if he was proud of himself.

I couldn't stay silent no longer, a scream escaped my mouth as I watched the wolf's body fall stiffly to the ground.

"Are you okay?" The boy asked me, sounding concerned. But I don't answer, I can't. My whole body shook with anger and fear had me cemented to the ground. "I mean what the bloody hell are you doing out in this forest? It's no place for a girl."

All I could do was look at the boy who I now learned had deep brown eyes that sat behind a pair of round spectacles. I no longer cared for the colour of his eyes, instead I wanted with every bone in my body to rip them from his foul skull.

End
file.